Oklahoma’s money bail system incurs millions of dollars in fees to our most vulnerable communities and keeps thousands of our citizens incarcerated each year because they can’t afford to bond out. People accused of nonviolent offenses can spend weeks or months in jail, costing counties millions of dollars with no benefit to public safety.

SB 252 would ensure that people accused of misdemeanors or nonviolent felonies are considered for unsecured release and are detained only if they pose a specific threat to public safety or have a history of failing to appear for their court date.

Analysis of court data shows the damage our current system of money bail does to individuals and communities:

Money bail amounts vary greatly from county to county.

The median bond amount for people accused of nonviolent misdemeanors varies from a low of $800 in Ellis County to a high of $2,500 in Canadian County. In FY 2018, the median bond amount for people accused of nonviolent felonies ranged from a low of $4,000 in Tulsa County to $10,000 or more in other counties.

Money bail drains wealth from our most vulnerable communities.

Bail bond agents typically charge a nonrefundable fee of 10 percent to secure a person’s bond. These fees take millions of dollars from Oklahomans accused of crimes each year, even if their charges are dismissed or they are found not guilty.

In FY 2018, Oklahomans accused of nonviolent offenses paid nearly $8.2 million in nonrefundable bail bond fees.
Defendants who cannot post bond spend weeks or months in jail even though they haven’t been convicted.

People accused of nonviolent misdemeanor offenses spend 2 to 6 weeks in jail before their case is resolved if they cannot afford their bond. In some counties, the average person accused of a nonviolent felony spends nearly six months in jail.

Counties could substantially reduce jail costs through smart pretrial reforms.

SB 252 would ensure that people who are accused of nonviolent offenses and are not a flight risk would be granted recognizance bonds. Many counties could realize savings of several hundred thousand dollars per year by releasing these defendants in a timely fashion without monetary conditions.

In FY 2018, nonviolent defendants spent over 329,000 days in jails across Oklahoma, costing counties approximately $8.9 million.

Open Justice Oklahoma uses public data to open the black box of our justice system. Program of Oklahoma Policy Institute / openjusticeok.org / openjustice@okpolicy.org